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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 000022

SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/13/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [BA](#)

SUBJECT: RADICALS DENOUNCE RULING FAMILY DURING ASHURA  
PROCESSIONS

REF: A. 08 MANAMA 845

[1](#)B. 08 MANAMA 874

[1](#)C. 08 MANAMA 536

[1](#)D. 08 MANAMA 592

[1](#)E. 08 MANAMA 593

[1](#)F. MANAMA 13

Classified By: CDA Christopher Henzel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The radical Shia Haq movement exploited Ashura processions to denounce Bahrain's ruling family. Erstwhile human rights activist Abdulhadi Al Khawaja called for the overthrow of the Al Khalifa family. Prosecutors later questioned and released him after a few hours. End Summary.

Ruling Family "Gangsters"  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) The radical Shia opposition Haq Movement used the large annual Ashura processions January 6 in Manama's old town to denounce the Al Khalifa family. As Ashura processions attempted to pass through the narrow, crowded streets, speakers at a Haq pavilion harangued a thousands-strong mix of supporters, curious penitents temporarily distracted from their religious tasks, and many who were just stuck in the traffic-jam in the packed street. Haq leader Hassan Mushaima denounced the "sixteen gangsters" running Bahrain, naming the King, Crown Prince, Prime Minister, and other Al Khalifas. Mushaima, who did not explicitly call for the overthrow of the government, said that oppositionists should appeal to foreign governments and international NGOs for support.

"Overthrow the gangsters and get rid of them"  
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[1](#)3. (C) Abdulhadi Al Khawaja, former president of the Bahrain Center for Human Rights (BCHR) and current Protection Coordinator for the Middle East at the international human rights NGO Front Line, also spoke from the Haq pavilion. Econ FSN and local media reported that Al Khawaja described the government as "corrupt, oppressive gangsters," and said, "Our first demand is to overthrow them and get rid of them...we must root out these gangsters." Throughout his speech, Al Khawaja made reference to Imam Hussein's battle against the Umayyad caliph Yazid in a thinly veiled appeal to Bahraini Shia to stand up to the Sunni government. He finished with a threat: "They lost the chance for peace." Prosecutors summoned Al Khawaja for questioning on January 9 and released him after about four hours. According to local media, Al Khawaja denied incitement against the regime even after being shown video of his speech. Econ FSN reported seeing the cameras pointed at the Haq table.

# Mainstream Shi'a Reject Al Khawaja's Attacks

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¶4. (C) MP Sayed Jameel Kadhem of the mainstream Wifaq party publicly rejected Al Khawaja's statements, telling parliament that Wifaq respects the hereditary rule of the Al Khalifa family as enshrined in the constitution. Another Wifaq MP, Jasim Husain, said privately that Al Khawaja had "crossed the line." Leaders of the Husseiniyas which organize the Ashura processions issued a public statement condemning Al Khawaja's remarks and Haq's politicization of the religious event.

¶5. (C) Comment: Haq rejected Bahrain's 2006 elections as rigged, condemns Wifaq for participating in them, and inspires the youths who frequently skirmish with Bahraini riot police. Haq appears to be spoiling for a fight following the government's attempt to link Mushaima's son to the alleged national day plot (ref A). Al Khawaja's January 6 speech may have been calculated to provoke the authorities to move against him, a development which would increase sympathy for Haq in the Shi'a community. The government has so far resisted the urge to lock him up.

¶6. (C) Comment continued: The moderate Wifaq party remains more popular among Shia than Haq. In order to retain its lead, Wifaq needs to persuade the GOB to deliver the housing, jobs, and steps against discrimination that the Shia street demands (ref B).

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